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# **Multilingualism in Algeria: between ‘Soft Power’, ‘Arabisation’, ‘Islamisation’, and ‘Globalisation’**

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## **Abstract**

The language question in Algeria is far from a straightforward case and its complexity and multiplicity make it an original case to study due to the diversity of languages, its language politics in both the colonial and the postcolonial eras, and its tight relationship to different ideological movements, which still affect issues related to identity, religion and ethnicity. The distinction between the colonial and the postcolonial eras is a necessary step to understand the layers of complexity of its language policies and provide a context which helps explain the relationship between language politics and ‘soft power’, as theorised by Nye. It also provides a timeframe for when one can start talking about ‘soft power’, in contrast to ‘hard power’ where the coloniser imposed its language by force (what is known as the Frenchification project). The article seeks firstly to challenge the Arabisation project in relation to Algeria and presents its close relationship to the Islamisation of the country through soft power practices. Secondly, it questions the traditional linguistic dichotomy between Classical Arabic and dialects by adding to them a new language variety, which appeared as a result of soft power through cultural globalisation. The concept is developed further to highlight the emergence of a ‘new literary genre’ which also challenges traditional discourses, linguistic rules and literary canons.

## **Keywords**

Algeria, colonial, Postcolonial, language policy, multilingualism, soft power, Berber, *e-Arabic*

*“To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture.”*

*Frantz Fanon*

## Introduction

Thinking of ‘soft power’, the overarching theme of this special section, in relation to the language question in Algeria brings to mind the postcolonial period, in contrast with ‘hard power’ as Joseph Nye (2004) describes it, as a coercive approach that involves the use of military and/or economic power to influence or control the behaviour or interests of other states or political groups which is, in fact, characteristic of colonialism. For Nye, ‘hard power’ is the ability to change by force established ways of doing things. ‘Soft power’, on the other hand, looks at ways of manipulating and indirectly influencing processes that lead to a change of decision without resorting to force. This article argues against the Algerian official and popular discourse which idealises ‘the Arabisation project’, and instead presents it as one example of a ‘soft power’ practice, a critique of ideologies such as ‘Pan Arabism’, implemented without taking into consideration other existing languages such as Berber and French. Through a chronological review of Algerian history, the article demonstrates political and linguistic decisions and how they affected various discourses to date. It will then present a new variety of Arabic, emerging as a result of globalisation, which I call *e-Arabic*. This variety of language, I argue, is the outcome of cultural globalisation; another example of ‘soft power’ practice. The article aims to contest the hegemony of Standard Arabic in the written medium through highlighting a new genre (based on e-Arabic), which made its way into Arabic literature by completely breaking both writing and literary canons and conventions. The core of this ‘new writing genre’ is the breaking of rules (grammatical, lexical, and syntactical) and more importantly the defiance of the

myth about ‘the sacredness’ of the language (Daoudi 2011a, Daoudi and Murphy 2011b).

### **Theoretical context**

Arabic is considered by many of its speakers to be a holy language because it is the language of the holy Qur’an. The religiousness of Arabic and the traditional relationship between the language and Islam have always been a form of power, perpetuated and indoctrinated over the years. Niloofar Haeri, in her book *Sacred Language, Ordinary People* (2003) argues that in Egypt people feel that they are custodians of Standard Arabic (SA) rather than owners of it. The sacredness of the language is often brought forward in discussions about Arabic.

This issue of holiness or sacredness of Arabic has been discussed for decades and is a controversial one today. Arab thinkers such as Al-Jābirī and Laroui have been marginalised for years because they challenge the sacredness of the language. For Al-Jābirī (1991), Arabic is an anachronism which has been ‘mummified’ and is unable to absorb or express modern categories of thought. According to him, tradition is preserved by ‘ahistorical’ and ‘unimaginative’ language. For him and for other radical Arab modernists, e.g., Laroui, the greatest need is to dismantle and rebuild Arabic, precisely because it is the bearer of a ‘rich intellectual and literary tradition’ rooted in the golden age of Islam (Abu Rabi’ 1996, 29). Al-Jābirī’s search is broader than language per se; he questions the structure of what he calls ‘Arab reason’. Making use of André Lalande’s concepts, he distinguishes between ‘constitutive reasoning’ (which Al-Jābirī calls in Arabic: *‘al-aql al-mukawwin*), referring to the mental activity that creates knowledge, constructs meanings, and decides on rules and principles on the one hand and, on the other, ‘constituted reasoning’ (in Al-Jābirī’s terms in Arabic: *al-‘aql*

*al-mukawwan*), referring to reason that is already constituted and which encompasses a whole repertoire, including the arts and sciences. Al-Jābirī attributes the regression of Arab reason over the last 600 years to its preoccupation with reproducing the old (constituted reasoning) rather than creating the new (Sabry 2010, 156).

Similarly, Sharabi (1988) dismantles the language issue in the Arab world in general, starting with considering Classical Arabic as the medium of neo-patriarchal discourse in which ‘beliefs, concepts, substantive information, and self-knowledge (modes of self-understanding and self-relating) of neo-patriarchal culture get formulated and produced in the shape of discourse’. His argument is that the radical dichotomy between *fuṣḥa* (Classical Arabic) and the everyday colloquial language, known as *‘āmmiyya*, does not end at one level only (one is seen as formal and the other as vulgar), but it goes beyond that to other levels. For Sharabi, the two varieties are in fact two different languages ‘structurally related but essentially different’ (Sharabi 1988, 84). The formal language (*fuṣḥa*) is considered a foreign language. More importantly, Sharabi argues that ‘a major implication of this rift has been the reinforcement of traditional social divisions and the concealment of material and class basis of cultural disparity: knowledge becomes a privileged possession, an instrument of power’ (85). The cultural gap between those who ‘master “Classical Arabic” and use it forcefully in public speaking bestows status and power, and by the same token the illiterate and semi-literate are excluded from this power’. The literate language produces two types of discourse: ‘one expressed in the traditionalist (patriarchal) language of the sacred text, the other in the language of progressive (reformist or secular) ideologists... Though the two discourses and their linguistic modes may differ in form as well as content, they are not essentially antagonistic, for in both their agreements and their oppositions they share the same basic paradigm’ (85). Sharabi’s explanation of the language system explains

the link between Classical Arabic as the language of power and at the same time the language of religion (power) and that despite the two ideological perspectives between traditionalists and reformists (secular), there is no real distinction, as the two discourses are mediated through the same language (in other words, it is a superficial change). In fact, Pan-Arabist ideology utilised religion in the nation-state formation of Arab countries. It was seen as 'the factor around which conceptualisations of the Arab nations can coalesce. In this context, the fact that Islam turned Arabic into the language of a vibrant culture, and led to the Arabisation of many communities, is a relevant factor in Arab-nation formation' (Suleiman 2003, 141). In the following section, information technology is highlighted to show how globalisation forced language change globally, including the Arabic-speaking region.

Information technology and the Internet revolution have put aside traditional views on language and created new dynamics globally, including in the Arab World. Language use on the Internet took and is still taking different innovative forms among Arabs, including Algerians (youth, government, elite, men and women, teachers, religious institutions, and ministers) in different languages (Standard Arabic, dialect, Berber, French and Hybrid language) and through different mediums (Facebook pages, blogs, YouTube, and many other forms), and forming new communities. This phenomenon, known as 'computer-mediated communication' (CMC), in relation to Arabic is the variety of language through which I challenge traditional views on language. My starting definition is that 'e-Arabic is a variety of language used on the internet and mobile telephony. The basis of e-Arabic is both MSA and Arabic dialects. It allows the use of dialects in writing (something that was not permitted by traditionalists). It also borrows and adapts words from languages like English and French; it allows code switching and code mixing, and uses numbers to represent

missing sounds in French and English Alphabets. Additionally, it permits the use of Romanised Arabic. Furthermore, e-Arabic is not bound by the traditional syntactic, semantic and lexical rules, as one of its characteristics is “language distortion” in order to create “impact”, aiming to engage not only with the globalised discourse as such, but also to highlight the specific ways in which the local frames the global’ (Daoudi 2017: 232).

*e-Arabic* is a new variety created and maintained by Arab Internet users.

Linguistically speaking, groups of Internet and IT users in the various Arabic-speaking regions have created what John Swales calls a ‘discourse community’, a term formed by analogy with the sociolinguistic term ‘speech community’. The former identifies regional groups that share linguistic norms and/or typical phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic patterns. Swales (1990, 87) describes them as ‘groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals’. In fact, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in Arabic allows distinguishing between a ‘discourse community’, which uses *e-Arabic*, and a speech community. The concept of speech community (SC) was introduced by Labov (1963, 1966, 2001) referring to the most often cited and critiqued definition:

[t]he speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms; these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behaviour, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage (Labov 1972, 120-1).

Significant here is the idea that members of a SC do not *necessarily* have to speak the same way—they must simply share a set of evaluations about the speech of that community. A good example is the SC shared by IT users from North Africa, who

might mix Arabic with French, and the SC shared by IT users from the Middle East, where there might be a mixing of Arabic with English. The following section will provide understanding of the complex nature of the 'language question' in Algeria with Nye's concept of soft power in mind. It will look at two distinct phases (colonial and postcolonial) as well as the status of various languages at different times. It will start with the Frenchification project (colonial), followed by the Arabisation (postcolonial) and its relation to other existing languages like Berber, French and English.

### **Language and Power in Colonial and Postcolonial Algeria: Soft Power practices**

To understand the language question in Algeria, one needs to go back to the colonial era, which started as early as 1830, when 'France established a host of political and administrative institutions to rule beyond its borders. These had significant effects on how people worked, lived, what they learned, and how they interacted with one another' (Maamri 2009, 77). One major effect of colonisation in Algeria was the dislocation of language. The imposition of the French language meant not only segregation but also illiteracy for the great majority of Algerian people. This imposed language policy, known as the 'Frenchification' policy, had detrimental consequences on local languages like Arabic and Berber. French colonialism was not only the exploitation of the Algerian economy or its military, or political domination, but it was an annexation of the country. This meant that it was 'l'Algérie Française' for more than a century. To clarify, more than three generations were born under the French rule. The eradication of the language, religion or any component of the native identity was done automatically and any colonised *native* tended to be seen as *Other*. Fanon states that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man (Fanon, 1967). This created a hierarchy of power, social class, and race, and paved the way to tolerating all sorts of



tortures of the native. The colonised Algerian society was divided in a hierarchal way. The French legislator constructed identities according to religion and land of origin. The Algerian population was divided into ‘indigènes Musulmans et indigènes Juifs, entre Français de souche et Européens’ (Carpenter Latiri, 2004). These divisions created social and economic hierarchies.

Studies on the colonial policies in Algeria, including the language policy, are extensive (Maamri 2009; Benrabah 2007, 2013; McDougall 2006; and many others). For the purposes of this article, I will single out one important study, in which Ronald Judy (1997) discusses the relationship between language and politics, and language and power; including soft power. Judy brings to light the decision of the FLN leaders regarding the Soummam Declaration (1956) in relation to the language issue. The declaration states that a fundamental objective of the revolution was the return of Arabic as the language of the Algerians. Interestingly, not only was the declaration written in French, but also, it did not ban French (107). This idea could be explained in two parts. The first shows as Judy (107) states that ‘legitimizing the elimination of difference as a means of attaining national unity’ was the motto of the Algerian revolution, led by the FLN (1954-1962). The motto goes back to Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Baddis, founder of the Association of Algerian Ulama in 1931. It claims ‘Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language and Algeria is my country’. It was the unifying ideology that all Algerians felt the need to share under colonialism and from which the language is framed as being a factor towards achieving both the Islamisation as well as the Algerianisation of the country, as I will show in this paper. Judy adds that the ‘equation language plus culture equals community’ (Judy, 1997: 107) was justified then and was accepted as a necessity for that time and the circumstances of Algeria then. Here, the French language had been used as symbolic capital to engage with the global community in the fight for liberation.

French was viewed as a means of communication with other revolutionary movements in the world. The second part is related to Ben Bella's first independent government's decision to 'temporarily' maintain French and continue with bilingual education as being a necessity for Algeria to achieve rapid industrialisation.

In Algeria, after independence in 1962, the country slipped into a battlefield of different nationalist and Islamist ideologies advocating the return to a strict Arab-Muslim identity known as *al-aṣāla* (i.e. authenticity). In 1963, the first Algerian constitution declared Algeria a socialist state and established both Islam as the official religion and Arabic as the official language. In 1965 Colonel Haouri Boumediene led a coup d'état and became the new president of independent Algeria, in a time where there was much unrest. As a solution, he used radical nationalism in various activities including the cultural sphere to solve the legitimacy issue. The language question was a priority in the colonel's agenda and drew its status from the linkage between Islam and nationalism (Benrabah 2013, 58). The Arabisation project was the soft way of legitimising the coup and framing it as being guided by Islamic ideals. While the discourse about the Arabisation project (discussed at length below), had the ingredients of success, in reality it became a central element of disunity. It started by marginalising the Berbers—the indigenous citizens of Algeria—as well as alienating the vast majority of Algerians who had a French education. French remained the only official language in Algeria for a while before being framed and narrated by revolutionary political rhetoric as the language of the enemy which should be eradicated.

The Arabisation project placed a generation in 'exile' in their own country as French was seen as betraying the nationalist sentiment which was growing not only in Algeria but in the whole Arab region, known as Pan-Arab Nationalism. I use the word 'exile' here to refer to the marginalisation, culture of exclusion, and the division

between French and Arabic speakers in a ‘struggle for power’ as to who will have access to posts. The struggle over power was disguised in different ways, such as presenting Arabisation as equal to Algerianisation. In other words, Francophone speakers were implicitly asked to conform to and adopt re-Algerianisation. McDougall (2017, 269) argues that ‘the regime’s rhetoric contributed to this framing of the language question as one of conflict between “authentic” and “inauthentic” culture, when in fact so-called *francisants* also—of course—spoke (dialectal) Arabic or Tamazight, and many Arabic speakers, most of whom were entirely monolingual, themselves had very ambivalent attitudes towards the French language and to norms deriving from French culture’. This means that the rhetoric relating to language in Algeria is mostly formulated by the state and in a way ‘artificial and imposed’, to borrow McDougall’s words (2011, 265). This imposed artificial rhetoric dominated the public sphere in Algeria and in many cases re-appeared in the 1980s in what is known as the ‘Berber Spring’ and later in the 1990s in the ‘Civil War’ by the Islamists who framed Arabic as the language of ‘Islam’ and French as the language of the ‘non-believers’ and ‘Hizb Fransa’ (allies of France). The violence exercised on the Algerian French elite increased in the 1990s and is a good example of what Martin Thomas (2012) calls ‘cultural violence’. Some Francophone Algerian writers fought back and decided to write in the language of the coloniser as a way of resistance, Kateb Yacine (1929-89) wrote that the French language was *son butin de guerre* (his spoil of war), Assia Djebar calls it a ‘paternal language’, and so on. This discourse about language continued to exist in Algeria, along with other discourse such as the Berber emancipation, use of the vernacular *‘āmmiya*, Standard Arabic and its relation to Islam, and so on.

Interestingly, while bilingualism was a reality, the discourse about Arabic and its relationship to Islam and to the glorious past were in full swing. Also, while Francophonie was described as ‘neo-colonist’, serving imperialism, most of the Algerian elites educated their children in French schools. Statistically, ‘the French institutions provided instruction for 15,000 children of which 37% were Algerian’ (Benrabah 2013, 63). This meant that most well paid jobs were given to the French-educated children and those who were educated in Arabic (government) schools could not find jobs. The excuse for recruiting Francophones was that the new economy required competency in French. The French centres and schools (e.g. Lycée Français in Algiers) maintained a high quality of teaching compared with national schooling, which declined. One of the reasons for the decline goes back to the Arabisation project, for which the government had no prior planning, as well as the recruitment of Egyptian teachers who were of very low calibre. What was remarkable is that the leaders, who were ideologically committed to the Arabisation project, sent their children to French schools as a form of ‘cultural capital’, to use Bourdieu’s term (1991) and gave jobs to Francophone elite, which helped the formation of what Benrabah calls ‘elite closure’.

Influencing through education and language (soft power) is not complete without referring to another variable which is English, presented as the language of technology with no colonial baggage in Algeria. It could be put into a context of rivalry between English, as the world lingua franca, and French, as the ex-colonial language in North Africa. After independence, it was clear that French was going to stay, as the first mandatory foreign language in public schools. For example, an Algerian child starts learning French at the age of nine; three years after starting primary education. English is introduced in year nine; at the age of 15. For language planners, it is clear that English is becoming more dominant in the world and is a vehicle of modernity and

technological development. Another factor which is also in favour of English is that the latter is free from ex-colonial baggage. However, in practical terms as much as the French language holds bitter memories, it is not profitable (including for economic reasons) to switch to English, particularly for the Francophone elite. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Islamists, i.e. the pro-Arabisation lobby, pushed for English to replace French, which was seen as colonialist and imperialist. Again, when we analyse the linguistic situation in practical terms, despite the Ministry of Education's decision to privilege English in 1999, it was found that over 73% of the parents favoured French as the first foreign language (Benrabah 2013).

### **Arabisation Project in Algeria: soft power practice?**

Arabisation in Algeria in particular came as a strong reaction against French cultural and linguistic imperialism. Algerian leaders of the War of Independence (1954-62) and successive governments committed themselves to reviving Arabic language and Islamic cultural values as the national components of Algerian identity. The aim was to recover the language of their ancestors and to be part of the wider region of the Arab region (Middle East and North Africa, MENA region). The following section will bring to light more complex issues related to Arabisation. In this article, I argue that the Arabisation project is a good example to illustrate the concept of soft power and at the same time show how the relationship between language and violence has been politicised. The Arabisation project was the way to push for Pan Arabism led by other Arab countries like Egypt and Syria. Nye (1990) defines soft power as 'the ability of one country to shape the preferences of another, and to do so through attraction and influence, rather than coercion'. The Arab countries' influence was seen in providing teachers, as mentioned earlier, and also offering scholarships to Algerians to create an

Arabophone elite to replace the Francophone one. This is also in line with the American sociologist Mills (1956), who shows how power relations are shaped and above all how decision making is reproduced by elites, noting ‘that individuals occupied particular positions of power within social, economic... and political institutions and formed a “power elite”.’ The decision to opt for Arabic was an example of ‘overt power’.

Algerian students were sent to Arab countries like Iraq and Syria to learn Arabic and to be trained to hold key positions. One example is the Minister of Education Cherif Kharroubi, a Pan-Arabist Berber who was a graduate of Baghdad University and who went for complete Arabisation instead of what his predecessor Mustapha Lachref who promoted gradualism.

The close relationship between Arabisation and Islamism has a long history in the Arab world. ‘The first, and most pervasive and lasting, response of the Arab patriarchal order, after being overwhelmed by Europe, was to take refuge in its religious tradition. Islam, as both an ideology and a model of social organisation, became the natural rallying point of resistance, as exemplified in the four classic political-religious uprisings against imperialist domination – of Abdul Qadir against France in Algeria’ (Sharabi 1988, 72). Through propaganda (soft power) and references to a ‘glorious past’, the Islamisation of the country began. This relationship grew in the 1980s-1990s (Coffman 1992, cited by Benrabah, 2013). This collusion between Arabisation and Islamisation in Algeria was, as mentioned earlier, due to the lack of graduates in Arabic after independence, which led to the recruitment of graduates from Qur’anic schools in Egypt and other Arab countries, confusing the teaching of Qur’an with the teaching of Arabic. The traditional language they taught was one ‘designed to assure supremacy of the religious perspective and automatically to legitimate different or opposing positions’ (Sharabi 1988, 96). Zahia Salhi, in a lecture at the London School of Economics, gives

a concrete example of when the government used Islamic propaganda promoting a return to Shari'a law, saying: 'the question of language put aside, the other vital area where the Islamists pressed for radical changes is the Personal Status Law, with demands that targeted women's civil rights condemning them to a status of minors for life'.

The powerful rise of political Islam, as a direct use of soft power, intensified through the soft use of the new media (Internet, satellite channels like Al Jazeera and many other religious channels) and through the distribution of free books and cassettes preaching Wahhabi ideology. The Islamisation of the country was embodied in the appearance of 'a whole new mood dominating the public sphere which was fully occupied by bearded men wearing *qamīs* and *sirwāl* (such as worn in Afghanistan), while Islamist women wore a plethora of new Islamic veils (*hijāb*, *niqāb*, *jilbāb*, *chador*...) which were all alien to Algerian society' (Salhi, *ibid*).

Drawing on the same theory of soft power (Nye 1990), i.e. investing in the education of the elite, is one way of influencing policies, as this category of people (the elite) is the one that is most likely to take up higher positions in government and affect policy outcomes. Arabisation and Pan-Arabism were not the only powers of influence in Algeria. France also wanted to maintain its power in Algeria through different programmes. Its soft power is seen in the number of bursaries given to Algerians to study at French universities, and also in the programmes taught in Algeria at for example the French Schools in Algiers (Lycée Descartes, later renamed after Cheikh Bouhamama). After independence, the French government maintained 'Centres Culturels Français' in most large cities and helped the French lycées, which were known for their high quality education. It was, as Ruedy, cited by Benrabah, 2013: 63)

states, easy for French-educated Algerians to find well-paid jobs in the emerging industrial sector, which required competency in French. They managed to get influential state jobs and 'reproduced the same attitudes to French language and culture as in France (110). The Berber elite was aware of the importance of the cultural capital and was also determined to combat the Arab-Muslim hegemony, and therefore went for French rather than Arabic. I argue in this paper that 'soft power' was introduced by the French, who had an interest in maintaining close ties with their ex-colony, but also it was exercised by pan-Arabists who were working towards maintaining the Arabo-Muslim hegemony. The relationship between Islam and Arabic has been instrumental in many other newly-independent Arab countries and was used as propaganda to control the populations, including the Berbers.

The discourse about Arabic reappeared in relation to Islam during President Chadli's tenure (1980s). He intended to reverse Boumedienne's policies in terms of socialism (1960s and 1970s). President Chadli maintained that Arabic is a fundamental element in the Algerian Arab Muslim identity, and started to give way to the Islamists who were persecuted during Boumedienne's regime. Indeed, the Islamists' influence increased in the 1980s, which meant that Arabic hegemony increased. This resulted in what is known as the 'Berber Uprising'. The feeling of a lack of real opportunities for graduates of Arabic, the sentiment of French hegemony over the country, and the poor political and socio-economic conditions for the majority of the population helped to foment the riots in the Kabilya in the 1980s and the civil war in the 1990s. Berbers favoured French and called for the institutionalisation of colloquial Arabic. In fact, the way the Berberist movement acted towards Arabic is very similar to the way Arabo-Islamic ideology functioned (in other words, the exclusion of the other). Unrest in Kabilya happened nearly every decade. In 2002, Berber became a national language



(Article 3 of the Constitution), but not yet an official language. In the spring of the same year, the government established the Centre for Berber Language Planning and the National Pedagogic and Linguistic Centre for the Teaching of Berber in French in December 2004 (Benrabeh 2013, 69). It was considered a first step towards plurality by Algerians.

The situation in Algeria had reached a deadlock in most areas (political, social, economic, etc.). After the country had seen five heads of state, Abdelaziz Bouteflika (the current President) was brought to power. He was an ex-diplomat, who belongs to Boumedienne's era. In public, the new President talked about the language question, saying: 'it is unthinkable to ... spend ten years studying pure sciences in Arabic when it would only take one year in English' (Benrabah 2013). This declaration admits the failure of the Arabisation project and adds a new 'variable' to the equation of language in Algeria, breaking away from the classic dichotomy of French and Arabic, (at least from the official side, because the Islamists had demanded the replacement of French with English earlier). The second thing is that the declaration shows encouragement of bilingualism. The latter has never ceased to exist. Bouteflika himself is the perfect model for a bilingual President, and his bilingual attitude starts from his conviction of being a successful bilingual. In another speech, he says: 'for Algeria, I will speak French, Spanish, and English, and, if necessary, Hebrew'. He adds: 'let it be known that an uninhibited opening up to the other international languages... does not constitute perjury... This is the price we have to pay to modernise our identity' (Benrabah 2013, 76-77). There are two important readings of Bouteflika's speech. The first is the implicit declaration of the failure of the Arabisation project, which in turn is a failure of the transnational Arabisation project (another example of soft power). The second is an example of 'soft power' through the cultural influence of both the United States and the

United Kingdom by way of educational programmes. Related to it is the coded language of the President showing his move towards further cooperation in relation to economy, precisely the selling of shares of national oil company to these two countries (UK and US).

By bringing up Hebrew as an extreme case, Bouteflika is also rejecting the ‘blackmailing’ by those who link Arabic to Islam and to *al-aṣala*. In reality, President Bouteflika never rejected French as a working language in Algeria. An example of the drastic measures taken by the president was when he set up the National Commission for Reform and Educational System (CNRSE in French) to look into the curriculum, textbooks, teacher training, and so on (making sure they are free from Islamic fanaticism). What Bouteflika really did was recycle the old colonial system and use the ‘return of elite closure’ strategy. By recycling a strategy of old colonialism, I mean that the French never ‘contemplated democratising the acquisition of their language in independent Algeria. Immediately after 1962, they approved of elite bilingualism, and a horizontal diffusion of French: its spread was selective and only dominant groups could learn it and have real competency in it’ (Benrabah 2013, 110). In other words, it is the ‘elite closure’ strategy that would reproduce the same attitudes to French. Ms.

Benghebrit, Minister of National Education, is a good example of a Francophone member of the elite heading one of the most difficult ministries in Algeria, despite opposing voices from Arabophones. Her speeches have been a source of mockery for her lack of proficiency in Standard Arabic due to her being native speaker of Berber, and also her French education. Having said that, Ms. Benghebrit has managed to challenge ‘old school’ discourses in relation to language by, for example, suggesting the use of Algerian dialect in schools in addition to Standard Arabic as well as teaching

Tamazight in most cities in Algeria (not restricting it to the Tamazight regions). The following section will take us to how Tamazight has developed in recent years.

Berber, on the other hand, as one component of the ‘language question’ in Algeria is an example of ‘soft power’ and how it was sidelined through the Arabisation project. It went through different movements led by Berbers fighting for the return of their native language as an official one. The most recent constitutional amendments, which took place in February 2016, give full rights to the Berbers to have Tamazight language as a national and official language in Algeria. This action came to complement and comply with the Berber demands to have their language considered ‘official’ rather than ‘national’ as stated in Article 3 of the Constitution.

Article 3: Arabic remains the national and official language of the State. A High Commission for the development of Arabic Language shall be created under the President.

Article 3b. Tamazight is also a national and official language. The State shall work to promote and develop it in all of its linguistic variety used within the national territory. An Algerian Academy of the Amazigh Language shall be created, placed under the President of the Republic.

The Berber question is far from being resolved by issuing the above article. However, the decision to include Tamazight in the Assia Djébar prize for Best Fiction is a good sign. This year, Algerian novelist Rachid Bouxerroub won the prize for his novel *Tislit n'oughanim* (The Bride of Reeds). The significance of the prize is important as it destroys the myth that Tamazight is an oral language that cannot be written down.

### **Globalisation as means of soft power: the case of e-Arabic**

The hybrid language (*e-Arabic*) resulting from the information technology revolution has led to the emergence of a ‘new literary genre’ as a reality in the last decade. This

new genre, which is sometimes called ‘chick lit’ by critics and ‘the new resistance literature’ by others, is different in form and in genre from mainstream literature. It starts by distancing itself from ideology and by defying what is perceived as taboo, like religion, politics, and sex, known as ‘*al-thālūth al-muḥarram*’ (the forbidden triangle). This new genre managed to break the relationship between reader, publisher and critic, giving importance to the process through which the text is produced. The traditional relationship between the writer and the reader has left both of them isolated from each other and from the world they live in. The gap between them had been widened due to the elite’s monopoly of cultural and social spheres. In other words, there has been a democratisation of literature, which for decades used to be restricted to the elite who mastered the Standard language. The gap between the Arab elite and the rest of the population is wide and the relationship between the two is one of power. The new genre prioritises the personal sphere in order to engage in what really matters to the public.

The opening of a new sphere created new dynamics that challenge notions of nationalism, replacing them with notions of ‘community’ (Judy 2016; Fanon 1963) and with global universal values (Nye 2004). It managed to transcend the local, regional, and national to the global, giving space to marginalised youth, women, and people from ethnic groups to express their feelings and ideas through different platforms. It is this ‘community’ which Judy (2016) based on what Fanon theorised as a society united not on a religious or ethnic basis, but united in their fight for freedom, using inventive language. The definition of *e-Arabic*, mentioned above, resonates with Fanon’s concept of a ‘new variety of language’, free from sacredness, from regionalism, and above all free from archaic rules. It is the ‘new’ language which believes in the human, in his capacity to change the world through communicating globally. It challenges the

centrality of Standard Arabic, linked to ideologies such as pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism, it embodies the ‘new intelligent’ human (Judy 1997). In the following section, contextualisation of the ‘new variety’ of Arabic is provided.

As mentioned earlier, a defining characteristic of this new language (*e-Arabic*) is its non-conformity with standard grammar. *e-Arabic* does not obey any ‘standard’ rule, in fact, it frequently ‘shocks’ the reader by ignoring and distorting grammatical ‘norms’ as well as addressing, as mentioned above, themes that have previously been considered taboo in a way that is accessible to the general public in the form of popular literature. I argue that *e-Arabic* coiners are, in fact, the users of ‘spontaneous grammar’, who chose to be distinct—to reference Bourdieu’s (1992) concept of ‘distinction’—from the mainstream users of Arabic. They coin new words composed from English/French, mix dialect with standard Arabic, and adapt borrowed words into Arabic. This implies that this power can also be exercised by using ‘spontaneous’ language, as it is the speaker who decides on what language to use and whom to address. Therefore, *e-Arabic* coiners are employing this new variety of language as a means of generating power (cultural capital).

The notion of using Standard Arabic in writing is an institutionalised idea. Likewise, using the dialect for the spoken form is the norm, and anything which does not respect these two conventions is considered as ‘incorrect’ and uncanonical. This is not to say that dialect has never been used in literature. What is innovative, however, is the sole use of dialect as well as the mixing of languages throughout the writing. This new practice of writing is still controversial, despite being popular in terms of readership in the Arabic-speaking region. ‘Language is a means and not an end’ is the motto that is motivating a high number of young bloggers to write in order to be heard in countries where expression has been censored. The argument is that the standard

Arabic, the supposedly ‘high’ language, has been for a long time a stumbling block for the vast majority of Arabic native speakers, and is monopolised by a minority of the elite population. The same argument was once advocated by nationalist leftist movements, promoting the social mission of literature to narrow the gap between the élite (bourgeois) and the mass population (Azam 2009). However, what was intended then was to encourage writers to interact with the mass population by using a simple language and stepping down from the ‘ivory towers’ to write about what preoccupies these people. It did not mean writing in colloquial ways, as this option was not available.

A special edition of *Al-Majalla al ‘Arabiyyah* (2009), reported on this new writing phenomenon. Writers from around the Arab world expressed their views about a new phenomenon which they called *The Internet Storyteller*. Their views varied between those who found this form of writing amusing and an addition to what is being written in MSA, and those who viewed this genre as a temporary phase which would fade out in the future, as it is not based on solid ground. The new trend of writing is not restricted to Arabic, and studies have focused on the effects of computer-based writing as opposed to earlier forms of written language production. Schmitz (cited by Androutsopoulos 2011) distinguishes between four levels at which CMC has affected the nature of writing: (a) *monologic* (computer-writing enabling flexible composition techniques and a less disciplined and uninhibited style of writing, which is one of the characteristics of young Arab writers using *e-Arabic*, as it frees them from centuries of institutionalised rules); (b) *dialogic* (a new writing style emerging in sites of public, anonymous participation, a ‘playful anarchy’ of hybrid, spoken/written patterns), a good example of this category is *Banāt al-Riyāḍ* [*Girls of Riyadh*] (2005); (c) *non-linear* (hypertext as a new principle of information structure); and (d) *interactive*

(collaborative writing and the fuzzy distinction between author and reader)

(Androutsopoulos 2011, 4). This interactive approach is adopted by Ahlem Mosteghanemi, a prominent Algerian writer, whose book mixes Arabic and English in its very title: *Nisyān.com* [Forgetting.com] which includes a website for readers to comment on the book, enabling both the readers and the writer to exchange ideas and interact with each other. This privilege is made available via the virtual sphere. The book is also accompanied by a CD, aiming to support and reinforce the theme of the novel, which is forgetting and moving on in life. Mosteghanemi dedicated her novel *Nisyān. Com* (2009) to her ‘hackers’, praising them for reading her work:

[I dedicate this book firstly to the hackers of my books. I don’t know anybody who waits for my publications as much as they do] (7, translated by author).

Arabised words are found not at the word level, for example *misājāt* [messages] (88) but also at the phrase level, including at the figurative level such *qīṭaṭ al-nīt* [internet cats] (88). The use of Algerian dialect is also present such as *Allah yaj’alnī ghāba wa al-nās fiya ḥaṭṭaba* [lit, I pray to God to make me into a forest so that people can come and take wood from it, meaning, I wish I can be of help to people] (7). In an interview conducted for this article on 26 September 2016, she replied to the question whether she thinks her later novels can be considered as ‘chick lit’, saying: ‘I don’t believe in the divisions of literature. I think I am playing a role that none of the Arab writers has done before. I run a website which has more than ten million subscribers and I have brought back the culture of “reading”... I interact with what they write... I think I am helping them become writers.’

As far as electronic writing is concerned, the most recent controversial case is that of a young blogger Anwar Rahmani, who was summoned by the Algerian police on the 27th February 2017 for supposedly writing an ‘outrage against God’ and also for

‘challenging’ the sacredness of the ‘Moudjahid’ [war veteran]. The accusations are based on the beliefs of a fictional character; a homeless man who believes he is a god in Rahmani’s novel in Arabic *The City of White Shadows*. Also, the character is a gay Algerian *pied noir* called Jean Pierre, a reference to the Algerian French writer and ‘Moudjahid’ [war veteran] Jean Sénac. The electronic novel was published online by the writer after he failed to convince publishers to accept it. Rahmani uses the internet as an outlet to engage with other Arab as well as global bloggers, using YouTube videos to summarise his novel and enhances the text with pictures and music. As far as his language is concerned, the use of Standard Arabic does not necessarily mean good mastering of the language, as there are few spelling mistakes that could be due to the influence of the Algerian dialect. For example, the use of the expression *yudhrim al-nār* with a /dh/ [set fire], should be *yudrim al-nār* with a /d/. This confusion is common in Algerian dialect (particularly in Algiers region).` What is common among Arab bloggers’ writings, as mentioned above, is their defiance of what is perceived as taboo, like religion, politics. The accuracy of the language in terms of grammar and spelling are the least of their preoccupations, as they perceive their role as bigger. Rahmani says: ‘I want to “correct” Algerian history by bringing to light a “softer” version about our revolution, which had always been portrayed as bloody and violent’ (Rahmani, 2016) not in bibliography. The combination of shocking the Algerian society by highlighting homosexuality and at the same time challenging the symbolic image of the ‘Moudjahid’ as ‘sacred’ are what makes the novel controversial, to say the least.

In Rahmani’s blog, topics like announcing the engagement of a gay couple in the city centre of Algiers is one example of how challenging if not impossible for gay to live in Algeria. Another very interesting text is entitled ‘*Usht balla... blā rabbik*



*muslim*' [shut up... you are a Muslim, with or without your consent (used as a curse)], where he uses the Algerian dialect to report the incident of detention at the police station. He uses the officer's swearing to criticise 'the Algerian Islamisation', which followed the 1990s 'Black Decade' and more importantly, he criticises the double discourse in Algeria. In another post entitled '*Jinirāl Tawfīq: hal kān ḥāmī al-ḥurriyāt al-dīniyya fī al-Jazā'ir?*' [General Toufik: was he the protector of religious and intellectual freedoms in Algeria?]. He asks questions about the controversial General Toufik<sup>1</sup>, who is known to be tough against the Islamists and the possibility of links between his arrests and the clampdown on liberal intellectuals. These controversial themes are the core of his writings, which would not have been possible were it not for the emergence of the Internet. The latter makes a good case for how cultural globalisation is used as 'soft power' to challenge and change discourse and societies (Nye 2004). Rahmani's extensive use of Algerian dialect can be explained by his awareness of the importance of language, in this case, Algerian dialect as 'soft power' to communicate taboo themes. His target audience is the local LGBT community, as well as a wider global readership. The discourse on writing in the dialect is the content of the following section.

As mentioned above, one aspect of literature in *e-Arabic* is writing in dialect, which is different from the dominant practice of writing in Standard Arabic and including dialogues in dialect for more authenticity. Writing a complete novel in dialect is what is new and innovative in this genre. In Algeria, Merzak Baktache's novel (2000) *Khūya Dahman* [Brother Dehmane] is one of the first novels to be written entirely in

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<sup>1</sup> General Mohamed Mediène, also known as Toufik, was head of the Algerian secret services, the Intelligence and Security Department (Département du renseignement et de la sécurité, DRS), from 1990 to 2015. He was described as the world's longest serving "intelligence chief".

Algerian Arabic. Baktache is a writer who was given the title of ‘Arabic language protector/safeguard’ for his writings in Standard Arabic. His experience of writing in Algerian dialect is not due to lack of proficiency in the Standard Arabic, but is an informed decision to use Algerian popular culture in a literary context. In an interview conducted on 6 May 2008, he said:

[When I search for the language, I search for the Human and the novel in our epoch is freedom. We (Arabs) stayed behind in this field (literature) despite the fact that we are the first to write the novel].

Mezrak Baktache represents a clear case of multilingualism in Algerian. His mother tongues are Tamazight and Arabic. He also writes in French as well as in Arabic. The experience of writing in Algerian dialect does not adhere to the traditional ‘Mashriqi’ discourse of writing in Standard Arabic or dialect. It is not similar to the new wave of writing, which is out of blogs and websites. It is a reaction to the constant dynamic discourse on language in Algeria. For Baktache, language is not as important as the human and his/her longing for freedom. It is a means and not an end in its own right. His stance is in line with Fanon’s ‘intelligent’ language that does not take into consideration ethnicity or religion but invests in the Human and his fight for freedom.

Fadhila Al Farouq is another Algerian writer who goes beyond the binary of Standard and dialect to write in a distinctive language which mixes Standard Arabic with Berber, French, and dialects from various Arab regions. In her novel *Mizāj murāhiqa* [Mood of a teenager] (2007). Al Farouq controls the language of the novel according to its characters in a harmonious way. The novel takes place in Ariss (a Berber village) in the Eastern part of Algeria where Louisa, the main character, lives under her uncles’ authority due to the absence of her father, who emigrated to France. For narrative purposes, the author used Standard Arabic in its different registers, from a religious language (Classical Arabic) for example, ‘*wa lā tulmizū anfusakom*’ [And do

not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames], ‘wa mā ūtīmtom mina al-’ilm illa qalīlan’ [And they ask you (O Mohamed)... And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little]. She uses historical language which reflects the rise of Islamism and the first killings of civilians by fundamentalist armed groups (1990s). She chronologically narrates President Chadli’s era, followed by President Boudiaf and his assassination (126). Al Farouq concentrates on the assassinations of Algerian intellectuals (148). She also uses Algerian dialect (songs and proverbs), for example she says: ‘‘illī fātik bi līla fātik bi hīla’ [Miss a night and you miss a trick] (38). In addition, daily Algerian language is used in the spontaneous way of ordinary people in ordinary families (from Chaouiya or from Constantine). The author presents the Algerian dialect as it is used in daily use, by highlighting its use of French, for example on page 84, she writes:

*ḥidhā’ al-rajul shakhṣiyyatuhu. Unzurī ilā ḥidhā’ihi.*

*La classe -*

*yabdū fi’lan kadhālika. Innahu rajul rafī’ al-dhawq. Bidūn ‘uqad, yuḥib kull al-nās.*

*.(.ṭabī’ī)...C’est normal -*

*Amīra amīra?*

*(Ajnabiyya) étrangère biṣṣaḥ... Yāḥāynik ... Princesse -*

*(ghrībah gāwriyyah)*

[Man’s shoes are his personality, he is a classy man, with no complex, he loves everybody]

[That is normal...]

[Princess, princess?]

[Princess, little do you know, ...but a foreigner]. (84)

The author uses local songs (from Algiers popular songs) like: ‘Yā al-rāyih wīn msāfir trūḥ ta’ya w twallī [you who is travelling, you will one day return]’ (154), and

French was widely present in the novel, for example when referring to titles of films: ‘Les Oiseaux se cachent pour mourir [Birds hide to die]’ (217). Tamazight is also among the languages used, given that Al-Farouq is Berber and her mother tongue is Chaoui<sup>2</sup>, for example, (2) ‘*Yā Nānna ikkar sūkrwār āj yūdhān ādh ‘addān*’ [Gran, move away from the corridor and let people pass], Chaoui is used when talking to her Grandmother who does not necessarily know Arabic. Another example is when her Grandmother replies ‘*Āsh hūlādhī īnitās īqīl*’ [My kids, please tell him to leave me alone] (27). From the examples extracted from the novel, it becomes clear that Al Farouq does not shy away from using this mosaic of languages. In a recent interview for this article conducted on 5 March 2017, she said: ‘Algeria is multilingual and multicultural and that is why we (as Algerians) should celebrate its diversity. Also, Algeria is a wide country and each region has its own dialect, nuances and its characteristics and this is why the writer cannot sound convincing if all characters speak in a similar way’. She adds: ‘My writing has been influenced by Tahar Watar, whose mother tongues are Chaoui and Arabic. In his writing, for example, *Urs baghl* [Mule’s Wedding] (1983), he celebrates Algerian languages’.

Kamel Daoud, a Francophone journalist and a writer was called by an Imam an ‘apostate’ and a ‘Zionist’ for declaring his identity to be ‘Algerian Muslim’ and not ‘Arab Muslim’. This Imam issued a Fatwa for the killing of Daoud in 2015. In an interview<sup>3</sup>, when asked about the ‘language question’ in Algeria, he said:

‘En Algérie, l’essentiel parle en algérien: le peuple, l’argent, les publicités, l’amour et la colère. Le reste est donc artifice: l’ENTV, Bouteflika, le régime, les imams, les “assimilés”, les islamistes. Tous ceux qui veulent que l’Algérie s’enrichisse, s’aime ou s’en sorte, parlent en algérien. Tous ceux qui veulent la posséder, la voler, la détruire, la nier ou lui marcher dessus, parlent en arabe classique. Ils sont une minorité dominante. L’algérien est une majorité dominée... Quand on vous dit que c’est un dialecte, c’est qu’on vous dit que vous n’êtes pas citoyen.’

<sup>2</sup> Chaoui is the Berber language used in the Eastern part of Algeria.

<sup>3</sup> Kamel Daoudi: <http://www.algerie-focus.com/2013/06/djazairi-le-manifeste-de-ma-langue-par-kamel-daoud/>

when asked about the ‘language question’ in Algeria, he said:

‘In Algeria, the majority of people speak Algerian: the people, the money, the ads, love, and anger. The rest, then, is artificial: ENTV, Bouteflika, the regime, the imams, the “assimilated”, the Islamists. All those who want Algeria to prosper, to love itself, or to get through, speak Algerian. All those who want to possess it, to steal it, to destroy it, to deny it, speak Classical Arabic. They are a dominant minority. Algerian is a dominated majority... When they tell you it's a dialect, what they're saying is that you're not a citizen’.

Kamel Daoud and many others, as mentioned above, believe that Algerian dialect is in fact a language in its own right. Assia Djebar denounced ‘monolingual’ Algeria, which the Islamists promoted in the 1990s. In Fanon’s terms, the ‘Algerian-ness’ here does not necessarily mean ‘nationalism’ but rather refers to a unifying language and culture that celebrates diversity and goes beyond religion and ethnicity and is positively acclaimed, in what Fanon calls ‘the intelligent language’.

## **Conclusion**

Although the so-called Arab Spring did not take place in Algeria, the vast majority of Algerians (including the elites) when asked why they did not show any sign of revolt, respond that they did have their own ‘unnoticed’ revolution, which lasted a decade. They feel that they have been let down by their fellow Arabs and no country offered to help. The atrocities seen in Syria, Yemen, Libya and Egypt have been appropriated to remind Algerians of their ‘revolution’ to which the whole world turned a blind eye. McAllister (2013) critically looks at ‘the assumptions that fears of a return to the violent 1990s are defining reticence towards revolution in Algeria’ and suggests that ‘the riots of October 1988 provide a more useful reference point for understanding the clear lack of enthusiasm for a home-grown Arab Spring’ (McAllister 2013).

This article has argued that the ‘language question’ has been present throughout modern Algerian history, from the Arabisation project in the 70s, the Berber Spring in the 80s, the Black Decade in the 90s, up to the present. The language question has been used as ‘soft power’ throughout the postcolonial era and the Arabisation project represents one example of that. The article has drawn on Joseph Nye’s theory of ‘soft power’ to show how the Arabisation project was framed as the nationally unifying ideology after independence. The Arabisation project in Algeria was also supported by the transnational Arabisation mediated through ‘imported’ curricula taught by ‘imported’ Arab teachers, who supported Pan-Arabist ideology and at the same time influenced ‘political Islamic ideologies’. Satellite TV channels such as al-Jazeera (Qatar) reinforced the link between pan-Arabism, Arabisation, and Islamisation of society. Other international agencies, such as UNESCO, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and ISESCO also pushed towards linguistic change.

Information technology, in this article, is used as the most effective example of ‘soft power’ practice. It is used to highlight the emergence of a ‘new literary’ genre, which takes *e-Arabic* as a medium. It also presents the Internet as another example of ‘soft power’ related to cultural globalisation. The concept of *e-Arabic* is used to highlight the impact of the Internet on the ‘youth’, as a form of ‘soft power’. Anwar Rahmani’s case demonstrates how ‘local’ bloggers communicate with the ‘global’ world on issues that have different resonances. Rahmani fits the characteristics of the ‘new literary’ genre in terms of theme and use of the Internet as an outlet. The ‘new literary’ genre is still considered as controversial despite its widespread use and its success in terms of the readers and reprints.

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